A manifesto for higher education, skills and work based learning: through the lens of The Manifesto for Work

Abstract

Purpose: This paper is prompted by recent professional and political events and specifically the politically oriented 'Manifesto for Work' recently published by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), to propose a manifesto for the broad professional sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning.

Design/methodology/approach: This paper utilises a unique form of political ideology critique, applied to the CIPD's Manifesto for Work, to propose alternative directions for practice, research and policy.

Findings: This paper highlights four key areas which need further research and development in the area of higher education, skills and work based learning. These are discussed in relation to: overhauling corporate governance; inclusive workplaces, flexible working, and disadvantaged groups; investment in skills, lifelong learning, and well-being; and re-balancing working practices and rights.

Research limitations/implications: This paper highlights areas for further research in the broad professional area of higher education, skills and work based learning.

Originality/value: This paper is a unique, time-bound political response to the current political landscape, and is the first to propose a manifesto for the professional sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning.

A manifesto for higher education, skills and work based learning: through the lens of The Manifesto for Work

Introduction

This year, 2017, has been entrenched with politically oriented events which will shape the professional and home lives of people across the globe, and have included the selection of new political leaders in major economies which will implicate the political activity in other countries (Wall, 2017b, *forthcoming*). Inevitably, in these circumstances, political parties and leaders produce manifestos as commitments to a future they aspire to create. Although the manifestos may not be enacted once a political party takes power, they are a general and broad guide to how a landscape may shift when a particular party does eventually take power.

In response to this, one of the oldest professional bodies for people and people development, the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD), aspiring to "champion work and working lives", established and released "The Manifesto for Work" (CIPD, 2017a). This manifesto is the most contemporary political manifestation of how work and working lives should aspire to develop in the future. Describing the circumstances of work as "the most uncertain and fast-changing political, economic and social context anyone can remember" (CIPD, 2017a, p. 2), it echoes many of the challenges of investing in people and skills raised in the Leitch Review over a decade ago (Leitch, 2006), but perhaps with a greater focus on responsible business practices. It says, with particular reference to the United Kingdom (CIPD, 2017a, p. 2):

> The UK faces a time of huge transition and transformation. We believe we must work towards putting people much more at the heart of business thinking and practice. It is people who drive creativity and innovation, productivity, customer service and all the elements of successful and sustainable enterprise of any kind. We need to invest in them, engage them, and lead from the principles that good work is purposeful, good work is safe, inclusive and good for our well-being, and that good work exists for the long-term benefit of individuals, organisations and society. That work can, and should, be a force for good, for all.
>
> And with a call to action to:
>
> make much more progress on creating inclusive workplaces and providing opportunities for progression, in a fairer distribution of reward, and in creating working environments that engage our people and support rather than undermine their well-being. And we need to rebuild trust in our leaders, in big business and in our establishment institutions.

At the same time, the professional sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning is also experiencing reform, and the OECD found that almost a third of the 450 educational policy reforms between 2008 and 2014 specifically targeted this area (OECD, 2015). Within the circumstances of this global reform, it therefore seems timely, relevant, and important to generate a possible manifesto for this area in terms of practice research and development. The Manifesto for Work, as a recent statement of political intent, is therefore utilised as a contemporary device to help examine and generate a possible manifesto for the broad sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning.

This paper is structured as follows. This section highlights the professional landscape of work and working lives and describes the symbolic importance of establishing a manifesto for the sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning. The next section then discusses the methodological perspective and method used, specifically an approach which aims to analyse political narratives to highlight areas to challenge with a view to generating new perspectives and 'points to consider'. This methodological approach is then put to work to generate findings, which in turn enables an outline of a possible manifesto for the sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning.

It is important to be explicit at this point that this paper is not a critique of The Manifesto for Work as such, but utilises the Manifesto as a lens to generate analytical points relevant for a manifesto for the broad sphere of higher education, skills, and work based learning. In this way, this paper is not

intended to be a map of the territory, but rather a prompt for reflection, dialogue, and debate which might then generate a possible map, and perhaps provide an insight into how the contributors to the Higher Education, Skills & Work-Based Learning journal may develop their practice research and development in the future.

Methodology

This paper engages a form of ideology critique which is deployed across a multitude of disciplinary areas including the political sciences (Žižek, 2006), media studies (Taylor, 2010), education (Brown and Heggs, 2011), and more recently and specifically, workplace learning (Wall and Perrin, 2015; Wall, 2016c). Ideology critique examines power structures typically missed by other forms of reflection (e.g. Sun and Kang, 2015; Trehan and Rigg, 2015; Wall, 2016c) and resonates with the "critical turn" in management studies which aspire to identify and disrupt inequalities or social injustices in different forms of organisations (e.g. Willmott, 2005).

Taylor (2010, p. 3) captures the ambition as aiming for "iconoclastic interpretation of the ubiquitous and deeply naturalised nature of ideology […] min[ing] the (only apparently) obvious and prosaic in order to produce startling insights". Similarly, Žižek (2014, p. 8) explains this with reference to a comment by Donald Rumsfeld, the then US Secretary of Defense:

> There are known knowns; there are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns; that is to say, there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns – there are things we do not know we don't know." […] But what Rumsfeld forgot to add was the crucial fourth term: the "unknown knowns", the things we don't know that we know – […] [which acts as a] frame, of our experience of reality.

This form of ideology critique seeks out "doctrine, composite of ideas, beliefs, concepts […]" (Žižek, 1999, p. 63) which then shapes how we relate to the world, each other, the planet, or other socially reified objects. As such, the analytical task in ideological critique it to identify language that is *present* in a context (which evokes particular material consequences in practice), and potentially language which is *omitted* but which exists around the particular context, which in itself can generate analytical points about power relations.

In this paper, the CIPD's (2017a) Manifesto for Work is used as the target of ideological analysis, as a political document by one the longest established professional bodies which explicitly aims to influence work and workplaces of the future. In this way, it is argued to be relevant to workplace contexts, that is, the site in which high education seeks to generate skills and learning. This is based on a theoretical sampling frame (i.e. the relevance of the document to a politically oriented aim) rather than an empirical sampling frame (i.e. based on frequency of the data *per se*) (Stokes and Wall, 2014).

The ideological analysis therefore produces provocative prompts to generate politically oriented findings (or perhaps more appropriately 'points for consideration') for professionals and researchers in the broad professional sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning (Brown and Heggs, 2011). This aligns to a movement of critically informed and motivated provocation (Ramsey, 2011; Ramsey, 2014; Paton *et al.*, 2014). The next section presents the analysis, with associated 'points for consideration'.

The Manifesto for Work 2017

The Manifesto for Work (CIPD, 2017a) itemised four main 'pledge areas' that multiple stakeholders including governments should commit to in partnership with organisations such as the CIPD: overhauling corporate governance; inclusive workplaces, flexible working, and disadvantaged groups; investment in skills, lifelong learning, and well-being; and re-balancing working practices and rights. Each of these is discussed below.

Overhauling corporate governance

The first Manifesto for Work pledge is to "overhaul the UK's system of corporate governance" (CIPD 2017a, p. 4). The description of this pledge includes establishing greater clarity on the "principles of responsibly and ethically run organisations" (ibid, p. 4), re-positioning the strategic importance of 'human capital' at board level (e.g. through the establishment of human capital sub committees), and developing greater transparency through mandating publically listed companies to report on their human capital strategy, development and investment. Amongst the finer details of this pledge are a range of governmental arrangements for the national living wage, pensions, and employee financial awareness (see the report for the details, CIPD, 2017a). There are two key areas to highlight in the context of this paper: the inclusion of *sustainability* and the notion of *human capital*.

The first of these items, establishing clarity around responsibility and ethicality in organisations, is analytically significant juxtaposed to the proposed manifesto of the incumbent government, where responsibility, ethics and sustainability are not directly mentioned *in the context of work* (this particular manifesto links ethics to the use of data and the sustainable development goals in a broad sense). Within a broader context of increasing media attention to the unethical behaviours of high-profile business and political leaders and the damaging impacts on people and planet, the inclusion of responsibility, ethics and sustainability appears to follow a broader meta development towards these values (Wall and Knights, 2013; Wall, 2017b, *forthcoming*).

The direct inclusion of responsibility, ethics and sustainability resonates with developments, albeit fragmented and limited in education policy and practice (Akrivou and Bradbury-Huang, 2015). Within the broad context of higher education, there are still staunch critiques that the sector is not doing enough (UNESCO, 2016). Indeed, within the more specific context of skills and work based learning in higher education, there is even less scholarship (Wall, Hindley, Hunt, Peach, Preston, Hartley, and Fairbank, 2017). Within this context, it can be argued that workplace learning has a tendency to focus on the shorter-term, more immediate concerns of the circumstances of work and learning, rather than other areas such as equality, climate change, and workplace health (Sun and Kuang, 2015; Wall, Hindley, Hunt, Peach, Preston, Hartley, and Fairbank, 2017). As a way of conceptualising a more holistic (albeit more complex) notion of sustainability, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals can be used (Wall, 2017b, *forthcoming*). Table 1 below outlines these broad areas. As such, to amplify and promote responsibility, ethics and sustainability in this context seems an important direction of practice research and development.

Table 1. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (based on United Nations, 2017, and Wall, 2017b, *forthcoming*)

1. End poverty in all its forms, everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages
4. Ensure equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained and inclusive employment, and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Ensure responsible and sustainable production and consumption
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve the oceans, seas and marine resources
15. Protect and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies and accountable institutions
17. Strengthen the means of implementation through global partnerships

The second analytical point here relates to the notion of 'human capital' as a way of conceptualising humans and their contributions to organisations. In another report, the CIPD recognise that this concept has been around for some time, but "modern people professionals have not adequately adopted a language which conveys their meaning" and acknowledge that it can be understood as "divisive and inhumane" (CIPD, 2017b, p. 4). The CIPD acknowledge that such an interpretation of the concept is linked to "dehumanising work" and the "commodification of people", which are "theoretical barriers to better utilisation of people data and analytics" (ibid, p30). The call to action from the report was for professionals to adopt "a positive notion of human capital" (ibid).

Whilst the intentionality of this call was positive, it can be seen that ideology has stepped in to conceptualise a human (e.g. flesh, blood, history, repertoires of experiences, skills, connections) as something to be utilised for organisational value gain, to be measured, invested in, and optimised. Table 2 below summarises some examples from various reports. There is of course no simple answer to responding to this, but there does need to be additional intellectual and practical working through of how we might re-formulate what it means to be a human in an organisation. We might gain some insights from alternative philosophical traditions where being human is much more interdependent on the communities in which, and land on which, we live and work (Wall and Jarvis, 2015; Akrivou and Bradbury-Huang, 2015).

Table 2. Extracts which illustrate particular conceptualisations of humans

Subtle statements indicating ideology	Assumptions
How can we determine the *value of the human capital*? (CIPD, 2017b, p 8)	Human as a business asset (like a building, a physical asset).
Measuring and *reporting* on people and HR: the HR *analytics discipline* (CIPD, 2017b, p 19)	The development of an emerging 'discipline' related to the precise *measurement*, *forecasting*, and *reporting* of the various dimensions of 'capital'.
Five perspectives on human capital measurement: *Cost* approach, *Market-value* approach, *Accounting* approach, *Value-added* approach, Human *resource* indicator approach (CIPD, 2017b, p 25)	Humans and their contribution can be (meaningfully) measured through approaches grounded in money and numbers.
it is difficult to *measure or predict* how workers will respond to *investments* in their human capital… However, '*soft'* metrics are often problematic. For example, data gathered through appraisal is subject to a number of *biases* on the part of managers who collect it, which means that… the data will have little value. (CIPD, 2017c, p 3-4)	Humans are an asset to be invested in (as a physical business asset), something to be predicted and controlled – and – 'softer' subjectivity and bias less favourable than such prediction and control.
the existing literature gives only cursory consideration to the *ethical* consequences of the *metrification of human resource management*. There is evidence that HC metrics and analytics can be used to make work both radically worse and considerably better for employees. (CIPD, 2017c, p 3-4)	A consequence of treating objects like inanimate items to be controlled and predicted; we do not tend to think of the ethical consequences.

Inclusive workplaces, flexible working, and disadvantaged groups

The second pledge in the Manifesto for Work calls the government to take action to "lead and support efforts to create more flexible and inclusive workplaces, to help individuals who are disadvantaged in the labour market, for whatever reason, to access and progress in work." (CIPD, 2017a, p. 8). A key thrust of this pledge area includes promoting flexible working practices in a broad range of areas and a push towards organisational transparency in terms of publishing workforce data (e.g. race and pay). Alongside these broad commitments, there are also some specific targets such as setting new (voluntary) targets for the proportion of women executive board directors in FTSE-500 companies. These commitments to inclusion and diversity are analytically important in a wider context where rights and working conditions in society seem to be under attack (Wall, 2017b, *forthcoming*).

In the context of higher education, skills and work based learning, recent evidence signals two important concerns in this area. The first relates to the extent to which the educational apparatus developed through work based learning pedagogies are sufficient to challenge organisational structures, or indeed reach the emancipatory aspirations of (some forms of) workplace learning. For example, some forms of workplace learning have been criticised for reinforcing the power structures in organisations and therefore the parameters in which people work and live (e.g. Trehan and Rigg 2015; Wall, 2015; Wall and Perrin, 2015; Wall, 2016c; Willis, 2011). Therefore, it seems there is more practice research and development to be done here.

The second area of concern relates to the extent to which particular groups who are learning in the circumstances of practice are treated. For example, Wall, Tran and Soejatminah (2016) recently highlighted the ways in which international students learning through work can be subject to discrimination and deskilling. The way in which these students can be positioned can influence the extent to which they felt they were able to challenge or change the situation (also see Gribble *et al.*, 2015). That said, and in contrast, there were also signs that some students can also find a level of agency to be able to navigate and attempt to change the situation (Wall, Tran and Soejatminah, 2016). Similarly, the notion of social innovation and change agency as a frame to design work based learning curricula seems promising (Alden-Rivers *et al.*, 2015; Rivers *et al.*, 2015; Pässilä *et al.*, 2016). More practice research and development seems fruitful in the context of work based learning in higher education to promote these sorts of agencies and outcomes.

Investment in skills, lifelong learning, and well-being

The Manifesto for Work is supporting greater "investment in skills, lifelong learning and improvements in employee well-being and engagement" (CIPD, 2017a, p. 4). At governmental policy level, the Manifesto urges the government to develop a 'forward-thinking industrial strategy' to tackle "the growing mismatch of skills supply and demand, low or stagnating pay for too many people, poor progression in the workplace and our low productivity" (CIPD, 2017a, p. 14). Specifically, it calls for an extension to the current economic policy of *linking* on-the-job forms of workplace and vocational training (i.e. apprenticeships) to business tax arrangements (i.e. a levy), whereby a proportion of the organisation's salary bill (the levy) can be accessed to pay for a wider range of people development activity. Even more specifically, it highlights people aged 50 or over and small and medium sized enterprises as particular groups to support. There are two main analytical points to be raised in this part of the Manifesto: the re-positioning of skills and the inclusion of well-being.

This pledge is reminiscent of the messages embodied in the Leitch Review (2006) over a decade ago, and appear to be an attempt to *re-position or re-assert* the importance of skills and lifelong learning, against a backdrop of: dramatic decreases in investment since the financial crisis of 2008 (Skills Commission, 2015); a recognition that 'older workers' "constitute the single largest pool of untapped potential in Britain" (Skills Commission, 2017, p3); and "a growing number of jobs… being left unfilled because companies can't find the right people with the right skills" (UKES, 2016, p 3). In a broad sense, such movements appear to support the professional sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning.

In addition, the pledge embodies the ideological assumption that higher education (packaged as a high-value, high-price, 3-7 year development product) is appropriate for the development of skills and work based learning for 'older workers' and small and medium sized organisations. However,

evidence now suggests this is a problematic assumption. For example, recent evidence found that some older workers questioned the value of university credentials to enhance status or offer work benefits (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2015; Fleming and Haigh, 2017). Similarly, other evidence suggests that small and medium sized enterprises continue to question the pace and price of skills and work based learning delivered through higher education (Rowe *et al.* 2016; Saraswat, 2016). It seems that these assumptions still need further practice research and development, to help find alternative solutions.

The second analytical point about this pledge relates to the introduction of the notion of *well-being* to the narrative of skills and lifelong learning. Examining contemporary frameworks of skills and work based learning in the context of higher education, well-being is not typically present (e.g. Ferrández, *et al.*, 2016). However, critiques of the more technical, instrumental, and overly-localised nature of some forms of work based learning in higher education do highlight how such forms can have consequences for well-being in a broad sense (e.g. Sun and Kang, 2015; Wall, Hindley, Hunt, Peach, Preston, Hartley, and Fairbank, 2017). For example, some forms of reflection can focus attention on individual activity and achievement rather than more collective resources and achievements which can, in turn, support resilience and well-being in the circumstances of work (e.g. Wall and Jarvis, 2015; Wall, 2015; Wall, 2016a, Wall, 2016b, Wall, 2016c). As workplace stress continues to be a global challenge, as outlined as a key aspect of sustainable development in Table 1, it seems further practice research and development in the sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning is important.

Re-balancing working practices and rights

The final area in the Manifesto for Work is a pledge to "protect and enforce existing employment rights and ensure that individuals know the protections they are entitled to and can seek redress where these are abused" (CIPD, 2017a, p. 11). The specifics of this pledge relate to a number of technical areas in which legislation could be refined and clarified, but it seems that this pledge echoes the broad messages of the other pledges in terms of equality and diversity and being enabled to navigate a complex system which requires a high level of specialist expertise (e.g. law, rights, procedures). Indeed, evidence of the importance of professional judgement in complex landscapes of practice, and the damaging effects of 'getting it wrong', continues to emerge (Wall, Jamieson, Csigás, and Kiss, 2017).

Ideologically, the pledge positions two areas as a dichotomy, or finding the "right *balance* between providing flexibility for employers and job opportunities and security for individuals" (CIPD, 2017a, p. 12, *emphasis added*). Here, it seems that 'modern working practices' are conceptualised as being at odds with 'rights', even though the Manifesto does recognise that this is "unnecessarily polarised" (ibid). This clear-cut way of thinking is also reflected in the sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning, for example, in relation to the 'clash of cultures' that need bridging in employer engagement, or the differences between 'academics' and 'practitioners' (Rowe *et al.*, 2016; Wall, Iordanou, Hawley, and Csigás, 2016).

The problem is that these simplistic ways of thinking are often described as critical reflection, where the underlying ideas and concepts are not questioned but fully embraced in the debate and scholarship (Wall, 2016c; Wall, Iordanou, Hawley, and Csigás, 2016). There is an extensive scholarship in conceptualising and responding to practice problems in circumstances of complexity, and an emerging scholarship in relation to enabling this capability in the context of higher education more broadly (e.g. Wall, 2016; Meakin and Wall, 2013; Whitchurch, 2009). Ideas that promote capacities to deal with complexity and competing demands include, amongst many others, 'navigational capacity' (Appadurai, 2004), 'reciprocity' (e.g. Wall and Tran, 2015; Wall and Tran, 2016), and 'ambidexterity' (e.g. O'Reilly and Tushman, 2013; Smith, 2017).

The move towards more flexible educational approaches (Wall, 2017a) will have consequences in how current students and future generations conceptualise the professional demands raised in the Manifesto for Work (CIPD, 2017a), and which can potentially realise a greater appreciation of the underlying power structures at work.

Towards a manifesto for the sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning

This paper has utilised the Manifesto for Work (CIPD, 2017a) as a relevant lens to prompt dialogue and debate about work and working lives of the future, and to consider the potential implications for the sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning. Summarising the key 'points for consideration' from the analysis above, the following Table is presented as a starting point for further dialogue and debate. The points are not intended to be an exhaustive list, but illustrative of how and where further practice research and development might expand.

How and where this dialogue and debate might manifest is an important question, and might include the national or international conferences and meetings which are held by the University Vocational Awards Council (UVAC), and importantly, UVAC's journal, *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*. It is also important to recognise that the 'points for consideration' below might also require significant developments in the teams which support and deliver skills and work based learning in universities.

Some of these may require fundamental re-visioning of programmes, projects, initiatives, and staff development, whereas others might need minimal (if any) adjustment. It is hoped that as a manifesto, the 'points for consideration' invigorate and stimulate potential practice research and development, the kind that can tackle the global challenges we face as professionals as well as co-inhabitants of a shared planet.

Table 3: Summary of 'points for consideration'

Analytical prompt from the Manifesto for Work	Points for consideration for the sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning
1. Overhauling corporate governance	• Promote ways to further integrate notions of responsibility, ethics and sustainability into programmes of workplace learning – perhaps utilising the sustainable development goals as a discursive and developmental framework. • Promote holistic and humanistic conceptualisations of humans (which link to greater sense of well-being and connection to people and planet) in and through the various forms of work place learning opportunities and pedagogies.
2. Inclusive workplaces, flexible working, and disadvantaged groups	• Promote the development and adoption of *deeply* emancipatory approaches to reflection and work based learning – expanding current perspectives and pedagogies. • Promote ways to further integrate notions of equality and diversity in reflection and work based learning. • Promote ways of enabling workplace learners to raise and attempt to tackle workplace inequalities (whilst at the same time being sensitive to localised cultures and practices).
3. Investment in skills, lifelong learning, and well-being	• Promote the further practice research and development of sustainable ways of developing skills and work based learning in higher education which are appropriate for diverse groups such as 'older workers' and small and medium sized enterprises. • Promote practice research and development into how well-being can be infused more directly into the sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning (including reflective practices).

4. Re-balancing working practices and rights	• Promote ways of conceptualising practice and practice based problems which cross-boundaries and which facilitate greater opportunities for radical insight (this might include ideas such as ambidexterity, navigational capacities, and reciprocity).

Source: The first column is adapted from CIPD (2017a).

Conclusions

This paper employed ideology critique as a research methodology to explore the CIPD's Manifesto for Work as a provocative prompt to generate a manifesto for the professional sphere of higher education, skills and work based learning. The aim was to generate new directions, pathways and possibilities for professionals and researchers, amongst a contemporary landscape of practice which is entrenched with high profile cases running against the principles of responsibility, ethics and sustainability. This is a call to reflect and act on a series of 'points for consideration', to refresh and reinvigorate a professional sphere which will continue to impact the lives and landscapes across the globe.

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